



NEWS COLUMN

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First Meeting of New Sustainable Farming Network

URBANA –A newly created network for people interested in sustainable farming practices will hold its first meeting on Saturday, March 5, from 6 to 9 p.m., at the Station 220 New American Bistro located on 220 East Front Street in Bloomington.

The keynote speaker will be small farms expert Lynn R. Miller. He has authored more than 14 books on topics related to animal power and alternative agriculture. Miller is the founder, publisher and editor of *The Small Farmer's Journal*, which has more than 40,000 subscribers worldwide. He has been actively engaged with issues relevant to small-scale, sustainable agriculture for more than 30 years.

Registration for the annual meeting is \$35 per person, which includes dinner prepared at Station 220 featuring locally grown food. To register, visit <https://webs.extension.uiuc.edu/registration/default.cfm?RegistrationID=5359> or call Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant at 217-968-5512.

The idea for creating the network grew from the Central Illinois Farm Beginnings program (CIFB) which is a year-long training program for small farmers, said Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, small farm and sustainable agriculture Extension specialist and co-facilitator of CIFB. Cathe Capel, executive director at The Land Connection, serves as the other co-facilitator.

“We realized that graduates from the Farm Beginnings program needed a vehicle to continue networking,” Capel said. “And this isn’t just a website, it’s people -- experienced farmers and beginning farmers learning from each other. It’s co-facilitated by U of I Extension and The Land Connection with direction provided by an advisory group of central Illinois farmers, so it’s truly farmer-driven.”

Information about the Central Illinois Sustainable Farming Network, including how to join the network, is available at <http://central.illinoisfarmbeginnings.org>.

People can choose to join as a farm or as an individual. However, the \$30 annual membership is being waived for everyone this year, so it’s the perfect time to try it, Cavanaugh-Grant said.

“Members receive lots of benefits including a directory of sustainable farms and producers and free admission to all workshops. As each workshop costs \$30 for a non-member, an annual membership pays for itself with one workshop,” Cavanaugh-Grant said. “And the workshops are very hands-on and intensive. For example, one workshop will demonstrate how to build a high tunnel to extend the growing season. For the soil workshop, we’ll be out in the field with probes learning how to take and read soil samples. These will be educationally intensive workshops, not casual visits to a working farm.”